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SUBJECT: SPLM APPOINTS CHAIRMAN IN ABYEI

¶1. (SBU) Amidst ongoing border clashes in the Abyei region, the SPLM has appointed Edward Lino as "SPLM Chairman in Abyei area." In his capacity as Chairman of the SPLM, First Vice President of Sudan and President of the Government of Southern Sudan Salva Kiir issued an "SPLM Chairman's Decree" on December 31 appointing Lino. According to the text of the decree, a copy of which was passed to CG Juba, Chairman Lino "shall head the Abyei Interim Political Committee and shall organize the people of Abyei politically and administratively within the general SPLM policies and the provisions of the CPA."

¶2. (SBU) Minister of Presidential Affairs Luka Biong Deng passed visiting polchief a copy of the decree January 2, explaining that the intent of the appointment is to show the commitment of the SPLM to the people of Abyei. Deng said the SPLM would not "abandon" the people of Abyei without any support or means of administration during the continuing standoff with the National Congress Party (NCP) over the border.

¶3. (SBU) Deng explained the appointment in the context of on-going clashes along the Abyei border. He said the Misseriya Popular Defense Force (PDF) militias, supported by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), had initiated the attacks in an attempt to complicate and delay resolution of the Abyei dispute. In a separate meeting January 3, SPLA Minister of Defense Dominic Dim Deng claimed that the Misseriya PDF had been armed and were being "pushed forward" by the SAF to attack SPLA units. He said it is clear that the SAF is arming the Misseriya because they are using gun-mounted vehicles, artillery, mortars, and rocket-fired grenades.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: With the appointment of Lino, who is from Abyei, the SPLM hopes to gain further support from the people of this exploited but administratively neglected region. However the SPLM will need to invest money and provide services, not just announce a party representative, if their intent is truly to bring "administration" to Abyei. The true objective of the decree is more likely for the SPLM to thumb its nose at Khartoum and demonstrate publicly that the SPLM will not abandon Abyei despite the NCP's continued stall tactics. No doubt the SPLM also wants to put pressure on Khartoum to accept the Abyei Boundary Commission report so that the "interim administration" called for the in Comprehensive Peace Agreement may be put in place.

POWERS